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To: Members of the Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 3100
Hartford, CT 06106

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Testimony in support of: HB 1097 *Creating a Special Services Endorsement for School Nurses*

Hello. I am writing to enlist your support for creating a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses. I have been a Registered Nurse since 1977 and have worked as a school nurse for the past 28 years, 20 of which were also as a School Nurse Supervisor. Although I retired this past September, this is an area that I am very passionate about, having seen many changes and challenges throughout that time. Of particular interest to me is the creation of a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses, which I feel is a long overdue recognition for all that we do for the health and safety of every child (and staff member) in the school setting. As it stands now, the educational preparation to become a school nurse ranges from very little to sporadic on the job training workshops after hire. By creating this endorsement, there can be a standardized educational preparation for all school nurses.

Forty- one years have gone by with no change to CGS 10-212-2 1982 regulations for school nurses. It is long past the time to come into the 21st century, because school health has changed drastically. Children with special health needs students no longer attend separate schools- medical advances have allowed them to live longer and thrive within the public school setting, with the appropriate modifications and staffing. Creation of this endorsement can help to ensure a standardized program that prepares nurses to effectively work in a school, something that does not exist today. Some administrators seem to have the impression that if a nurse has passed the required licensing examination boards to become a Registered Nurse, that makes them qualified to work in a school. But from my own personal experience, I know that is not enough. When I began working at the North Haven Middle School in 1994, I already had 17 years of excellent hospital experience under my belt. However, I quickly learned that working in an academic environment as the sole health care professional required a completely different skill set that I did not yet possess. I knew nothing about the PPT process, or what an Individualized Educational Plan was. The term “504 Accommodation Plan” was equally baffling, yet I was immediately expected to be an integral part of those meetings to advocate on behalf of the students and their families. Yes, eventually I became very adept with my role, thanks to workshops and furthering my college education, but my point is, there are no other school professionals (counselors, social workers, psychologists, speech and language therapists) who

are allowed to work in schools without the proper training and preparation prior to starting. Why should it be any different for nurses who bear a tremendous responsibility? We deserve professional equity with our colleagues, and the way to accomplish this is through the creation of standardized preparation. This can result in a well- prepared, professional workforce of school nurses capable of high levels of service to students, staff, and administrators from the start. It's a win-win for everyone!

As I mentioned earlier, I am now retired so this will not benefit me personally. As a former Nursing Supervisor, I can tell you that it is getting much more difficult to recruit the next generation of school nurses and substitute school nurses. There is a tremendous amount of competition out there. School nursing is a complex specialty that requires a unique skill set where education, not medicine, is the primary focus. The creation of a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses will require a standard of preparation for the role of a school nurse, and will offer professional equity with their peers. It is well beyond time to change outdated regulations to effectively meet the increasingly complex needs of a diverse student population in an ever-changing environment.

Thank you.

Respectfully submitted by
Annette Sauerbrunn MPH, RN